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240600Z Feb 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000276

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2006

TAGS: PHUM PREL NI

SUBJECT: DOZENS REPORTEDLY KILLED IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

Classified By: Pol-Econ Chief Ava Rogers per 1.4 b,d, and e

1. (SBU) Summary: The Nigerian Joint Military Task Force (JTF) along with local militia reportedly "stormed" the village of Odioma in Bayelsa State, February 19, killing dozens. The operation was in response to the February 3 deaths of 12 individuals, including four local councilmen, who were attempting to mediate a dispute between two communities over Shell oil company benefits. End Summary.

Dozens Dead After Military, Police
and Militia Invade Odioma

2. (SBU) Press reported that about 200 men, some in camouflage and some identified as "local cult members" invaded Odioma on February 19. 20 speedboats and three gunboats reportedly backed the operation. Press accounts of the number of people killed range from 40-80, with up to 200 reportedly injured.

3. (C) Bayelsa State Information Commissioner Orono Douglas confirmed to Polspec that Bayelsa governor D.P. Alamiyeseigha ordered a joint team of soldiers, police, and local militia groups to "fish out" those responsible for the February 3 deaths. Douglas declined comment on the number of people killed during the February 19 operation.

Shell Memorandum of (Mis) Understanding?

4. (C) On February 3, a delegation of 12 members were killed as they were attempting to mediate a territorial dispute between the Odioma and Obioku communities regarding land on which the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was carrying out exploratory drilling. Don Boham, SPDC Corporate External Affairs Manager, told energyoff SPDC had an operable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Obioku community but that following the February 3 violence, SPDC withdrew its crew and would rely on the state and local governments to determine which group had a rightful claim to the land. According to the press, Odioma leaders affirm their claim to the land, but deny Odioma members were involved in the deaths of the mediation delegation, saying "unknown" gunmen killed them. (Comment: MOUs with energy companies frequently spawn violent territorial disputes between neighboring communities as each competes for the associated benefits. End Comment.)

Government Establishes Investigative Committee

5. (SBU) Bayelsa Governor Alamiyeseigha told journalists that he resorted to military action when "all efforts to persuade the communities to embrace peace failed." Our security contacts from the energy sector told us that the local police had been unable to stem the escalating tension between the two communities. According to the press, the Senate has directed its committees on Defense, Police Affairs, Security, and Intelligence to visit the area and investigate the deaths.

KRAMER